



Public Participation In Resource Management Planning

Asking the Public
to Help Design
a Public Participation
Process for the U.S. BLM
Dillon Field Office RMP

Prepared by the
Montana Consensus Council
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INTRODUCTION

This summer, the Dillon Field Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will begin a four-year process to update its Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the 902,000 acres of public land and 1.3 million acres of mineral rights under the agency's jurisdiction in southwest Montana. The new RMP will allocate lands for appropriate uses and establish goals and objectives for resource conditions on those lands.

To ensure that the RMP meets the needs and interests of a diverse array of resource users and the public, the BLM has asked the Montana Consensus Council to involve public officials and citizens in designing a public participation process for the RMP effort. This is a unique opportunity—**never before on such a scale has an agency asked the public to define how it wants to participate in management planning.** To fund this phase of the process, the BLM Dillon Field Office applied for and received a grant from the U.S. Institute of Environmental Conflict Resolution, a federal program funded by Congress.

The Montana Consensus Council is a small state agency that promotes the use of fair and effective processes to help people build agreement on natural resource and other public policy issues. The Council is impartial and nonpartisan; it is not an advocate for any interest or outcome. We are committed to impartially assessing the situation and offering recommendations on how to design a meaningful public participation process for the RMP planning effort.

METHODS

The Dillon Field Office will rely on new agency guidelines for developing RMPs, which include frequent opportunities for public participation. Each step of the public participation and planning efforts will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal statutes and regulations. The agency also intends to build on the Dillon area's long history of public participation and collaboration among agencies, interest groups, and the public.

During spring of 2001, the Montana Consensus Council mailed surveys to more than 1,000 people interested in resource management on BLM lands in southwestern Montana. The mailing list was provided by the Dillon Field Office and included Montanans and people from around the country representing a wide range of interests. We received nearly 300 completed surveys, and respondents represented a cross-section of diverse interests, including grazing, hunting, wildlife and fisheries, wilderness, mining, timber, motorized and non-motorized recreation, and county, state, and federal government. (For a copy of the report summarizing the survey results, contact the Montana Consensus Council).

In the survey, we asked people what their primary interests were in BLM lands. We offered check-offs for eight interests and an "other" for write-in interests. Each of these interests was ranked as "most important" by at least some of the respondents. The interests, in order of the

percentage of people ranking each as “most effective,” are:

- Wildlife and fish
- Livestock grazing
- Outdoor recreation
- Watershed
- Wilderness
- Oil, gas, and minerals
- Timber
- Cultural and historical resources

Survey respondents also identified a number of “other” interests, including public access, land exchanges, hunting and fishing, interagency cooperation, economies and county tax bases, and weed management.

We also asked people to identify what would be the most effective way for them to provide input to the BLM for the RMP process. For this question, we offered check-offs for eight participation methods and an “other” category. Each of these methods was ranked as “most effective” by at least some of the respondents. The methods, in order of the percentage of people ranking each as “most effective,” are:

- Surveys and questionnaires
- Public meetings or hearings
- Focus groups or citizen panels
- Collaborative problem solving
- Submit own alternative
- Open houses
- Advisory committees
- Web pages and the Internet

The survey also included a check-off for people interested in one-on-one or small-group interviews to further discuss public participation strategies. Based on responses to that check-off, Council staff interviewed about 70 people who represented all of the interests that were identified during the initial survey. This report summarizes what we heard during those interviews. It also presents recommendations for designing a public participation process to help the BLM develop the Resource Management Plan.

We mailed each potential interviewee a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix B), a diagrammed overview of the BLM RMP planning process, a checklist of collaborative strategies for NEPA and BLM resource management planning, and a preliminary list of RMP planning criteria and sideboards developed by the BLM.

We conducted nine interviews with small groups of like-minded people. These interviews were done in person in Butte, Dillon, Bozeman, Helena, Virginia City, and Sheridan. We also interviewed people one-on-one by telephone. Although we tried to reach everyone who wanted to be interviewed, some people were unavailable or did not return our calls. Additional information was obtained from written documents, including: the BLM Planning Process, An Overview; H-1601-1 Land Use Planning Handbook, Appendix C (Program-Specific and Resource-Specific Decision Guidance); and the settlement agreement stemming from *Gallatin Wildlife Association, National Wildlife Federation, Plaintiffs, vs. Scott Powers, Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management - Dillon Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, Defendants, and Montana Public Lands Council, Defendant-Intervenor*.

This is not an exhaustive study, nor an end in itself. Some relevant opinions and interests may not be presented here, and the design of the RMP public participation process may change somewhat to reflect additional input. **Think of this report as a starting point for further conversations about public participation and the RMP process.**

The Montana Consensus Council will convene a public workshop to hear comments on this report and to further discuss public participation strategies for the RMP process. The workshop is scheduled for Thursday, July 12, 2001, at 6:30 p.m. at the Lewis and Clark Room, University of Montana – Western, in Dillon. The workshop is open to the public. If you want to help design the public participation process, or if you were not interviewed but wish to participate, please plan to attend.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION

The Dillon Field Office currently operates under a Management Framework Plan that was completed in 1979. The Field Office acknowledges that, since this plan was implemented, many new uses and management concerns have arisen. Also, new BLM requirements for resource planning are not adequately addressed by the aging plan. At one point, the Field Office considered amending the 1979 plan on an issue-by-issue basis. This approach was abandoned, however, based on public comment and a subsequent lawsuit.

The lawsuit stemmed from a proposal by the Field Office to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on oil and gas leasing. The EIS would have been drafted as an amendment to the existing management plan. In April 2000, the Gallatin Wildlife Association and the National Wildlife Federation filed a complaint against the Dillon Field Office and the BLM in United States District Court. The complaint objected to the oil and gas EIS amendment and alleged that the Dillon Field Office had failed to develop a Resource Management Plan, as required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The complaint further alleged that the Dillon Field Office had failed to designate any areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), and had developed the Muddy Creek Allotment Management Plan without regard for special management considerations that might have been adopted through ACEC designation.

The Montana Public Lands Council intervened on behalf of the BLM, and in December 2000 the parties agreed to settle the complaint. In the settlement agreement, BLM agreed to begin preparation of an RMP for the Dillon Field Office by September 2001. BLM further agreed that the RMP:

- would give priority to the designation and protection of ACECs, and that each ACEC

must meet the criteria of relevance and importance;

- would consider sage grouse habitat protection, conservation, and restoration;
- would include an evaluation of oil and gas leasing;
- would identify which lands are available and unavailable for livestock grazing; and
- would identify criteria for determining future allotment-specific adjustments in permitted use.

All parties agreed that the terms of the settlement agreement do not dictate or predispose any management actions by the BLM. Resource management decisions, they agreed, would be determined by the RMP process. The relevant provisions of the settlement agreement were included in the draft sideboards prepared by BLM for the public participation interview process.

This settlement agreement set the schedule for initiating the RMP process, but it is not the sole reason behind the Dillon Field Office's RMP planning effort. Field Office staff have long recognized the need for an updated RMP, but the agency only recently succeeded in obtaining funding for this purpose.

FINDINGS

The Findings section summarizes the views and concerns of the people we interviewed. Our intent here is to build a common understanding of people's interests and concerns about public participation in the Resource Management Planning process. The Montana Consensus Council presents these statements without evaluating them for factual accuracy. Copies of the unabridged interview comments are available from the Montana Consensus Council.

The people we interviewed represent a wide range of interests concerning resource management on BLM lands in southwestern Montana. We heard from ranchers and farmers; motorized and non-motorized recreational users; oil, gas, and mineral developers; timber interests; fish and wildlife advocates; anglers and hunters; wilderness advocates; county officials; other government officials; and the general public. Many people said that they represent multiple uses rather than any single use.

Preliminary Interests and Concerns

Although the interviews were intended to focus on public participation ideas and strategies, we started each interview by asking people to briefly describe their interests and concerns. This gave us a preview of at least some of the key issues likely to be addressed by the RMP. It also gave us a chance to gauge people's level of satisfaction or frustration with the existing situation, and to map out areas of common ground—issues on which people generally agree despite their diverse interests.

Many people mentioned **travel management and access to public land** as a priority. Many people are concerned that the public is losing access to public lands, yet nearly everyone acknowledged that some land and trail closures may be necessary to protect sensitive resources or values. Several people said that the rationale for such closures must be specific, reasonable, and fair.

Motorized users in particular are frustrated by closures under the vague heading of “wildlife habitat” where no particular species, wildlife value, precise location, or time frame is specified. They suggested that more people would respect closures if the reason was clear and specific, and if the closures were seasonal, temporary, or distributed on a rest-rotation basis.

Motorized users also said that the BLM's mandate requires them to accommodate multiple uses, and they would like to see special areas set aside for motorized use. They worry that every new management plan on federal lands means more

closures. Other people said that off-road motorized use is too widespread and should be restricted to specific trails. They cited concerns about wildlife and soil disturbance and conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation. Some people suggested improving access to public lands through land exchanges, but others are concerned that increased federal land ownership leads to increased regulations on land use. Some people also said that the land exchange process tends to be politically motivated and done for the benefit of the person receiving public land, not the benefit of the government and the public.

Several people said that the BLM needs to improve its **range management** program. They called for better weed control, water development, and other range improvements. One person voiced concern that BLM has a large budget for burning sagebrush and that this could drive the planning process.

Some people would like to see **grazing** use grow or at least stay at present levels, but they worry that the BLM and environmental advocates want to reduce grazing use. Other people said that grazing is damaging wildlife habitat and riparian zones. They want to see more effective regulation of grazing and prevention or mitigation of impacts. Several people, including permittees and wildlife advocates, suggested that reductions in permitted use should be based on defensible, scientific criteria and should not be made arbitrarily.

Several people said that the RMP should reflect proper **land stewardship** and **sustainable uses**, and one person said that “best management practices” should be developed for all uses.

Many people talked about **fish and wildlife**, focusing on habitat and sensitive or vulnerable species such as sage grouse, goshawks, and westslope cutthroat trout. Some said the BLM management was causing or worsening problems for some species. Most people agree that management should strive to support and sustain fish and wildlife populations, but many people also voiced concern that some species (notably

sage grouse) could become political “spotted owls,” used to block certain uses or development. Many people said that fish and wildlife management should be based on science rather than opinion or emotions.

Several people said that it was time to finalize decisions on **Wilderness Study Areas** and move on. People generally agree that wilderness designation should be granted or denied on a case-by-case basis. Some people said that there is more than enough designated wilderness in the region already, and that locking out multiple uses from more land is unreasonable. Other people said that certain Wilderness Study Areas were well suited for designation. One person said it was important to maintain the wilderness characteristics of the Centennial Valley.

Several people said that **oil, gas, and minerals** are treated more as a liability than a resource to be managed. They said that access is restricted and the industry is over-regulated. Most people recognized that the business climate for minerals is down across the state and throughout the West. Some said that with proper techniques, mineral development does not have to conflict with conservation values. Other people, however, said that small mines are not being reclaimed and their environmental impacts are ignored. They also worried about oil development on wildlife management areas where BLM holds the mineral estate and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks owns or controls the surface estate.

Several people said that the BLM should be more aggressive in managing **timber**, increasing the harvest and salvaging burned timber before it goes to waste. They also want more flexibility built into contracts to allow operators to follow market trends (such as harvesting pulp wood when the demand for pulp goes up). Other people said the rationale behind the BLM’s timber program and vegetation management is unclear.

Water and riparian issues were brought up by several people. Some said that the BLM needs to identify and protect streams and riparian zones

that have been degraded or have water quality problems. One person said that BLM has a drought policy that was never implemented, and another complained that BLM is buying up water rights, which are then no longer available to private landowners. Fishing guides are also concerned that the RMP process might regulate commercial use on rivers that flow through BLM lands.

Many people said they want to see improved **coordination among government agencies**. Officials from Madison County said that they want a meaningful dialogue with the BLM through the process defined in their interagency agreement. Officials from Beaverhead County want the county to be recognized as a “government entity with equal standing” and to be included on the BLM’s interdisciplinary team. Both counties emphasized that land management should sustain the resource, the tax base, and local economies.

Many people said that the BLM should coordinate planning with other agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; and counties. They said that many issues (for example as public access, wildlife habitat, sage grouse, water quality, weed control, elk permits) span jurisdictional boundaries, and that regulatory and permitting requirements should be consistent among adjacent jurisdictions. Several people disagreed, however, saying that such coordination was asking too much of agencies that lacked consistency from one district to another within the same agency. Some said that sharing information would be okay, but agencies should not do joint planning.

Finally, given that the interviews were meant to focus on the **process of public participation**, it is not surprising that many people raised concerns about previous public involvement efforts and about the upcoming RMP process. **Everyone said that the BLM needs to listen to public comment and demonstrate that it heard what the public said.** People want to see how public input was used in developing the RMP, and when

it isn't used, they want to know why. People also want the process to be "open and honest," and "genuine." Some say they are reluctant to participate because they suspect that the outcome is predetermined—that the decisions have already been made. A few people are concerned that internal conflicts within the Dillon Field Office will affect the planning process and may weaken implementation of the RMP.

Many people said that local input should have more influence over the RMP than regional or national input because local people have more at stake. But others said that local input must be balanced with national interests because these are federal lands with national values. Several people worried that environmental groups are better funded than other interest groups and therefore wield undue influence. A few people said that the RMP must consider a broad range of resource issues, not just respond to the groups that want to use the resources.

Several people said that four years to develop the RMP is too long, that participants will burn out. Many people voiced irritation at past processes where meetings were scheduled during the work day, around holidays, or in distant towns. Others said that young people aren't likely to participate because they think it's a waste of time. Many people said the process should make it easy for people to participate.

Several people said that public input was important, but that the process should clarify and respect BLM's role as a participant and as the final decision maker. Many people said that anyone engaged in a collaborative effort must participate in good faith, and several mentioned that the process must protect against people who come late to the table to undermine the work that's been accomplished.

Members of the BLM's Resource Advisory Council (RAC) said that any citizen group formed to assist with the RMP process should function as a subgroup under the RAC. Members also said they would prefer that one or a few subgroups would focus on key or "deal-breaker" issues. The

process, they said, should focus on key issues that the group could actually resolve, rather than bogging down in small stuff or unresolvable issues.

Comments on the BLM Sideboards

Before conducting the interviews, the Montana Consensus Council asked the Dillon Field Office to prepare a preliminary list of sideboards or constraints that the agency faces going into the RMP process. This list was mailed to the interviewees and included items such as compliance with applicable federal laws and regulations, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); integrating local, state, and national interests; adherence to previous decisions and plans (Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing, joint USFS/BLM Off-Road Vehicle Amendment, BLM's Interim Management Policy for Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), and WSA boundaries set under section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, etc.), and consistency with the plans and mandates of other agencies with jurisdiction in the area.

The sideboards also noted that the RMP process would unfold over four years, and that the Draft RMP would include several alternatives, with a Preferred Alternative identified. Final approval of the RMP, it continued, rests with the BLM State Director.

These sideboards drew many comments. Many people said that the sideboards needed clarification. Several said that maps would be helpful. People asked for more specific information on:

- Which sideboards are negotiable, and an explanation for the sideboards that are non-negotiable
- Wilderness Study Areas, including criteria for 603 and 202 lands and WSA boundaries
- BLM's legal mandate

- The Off-road Vehicle Amendment and the definitions of “trails” and “off-road vehicle”
- The settlement agreement between the BLM and the National Wildlife Federation and the Gallatin Wildlife Association
- The definition of “multiple use”
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Standards for scientific information, including information sources and monitoring strategies
- The Interim Management Plan
- Resource Advisory Council guidelines
- An evaluation of the implementation of the Headwaters RMP
- A defined planning horizon
- Travel management, particularly the sideboard excluding travel management in the Centennial Valley from further consideration
- Budget and staffing limitations

Some people said the sideboards are too constraining. They want more flexibility to address certain issues, notably Wilderness Study Areas and threatened and endangered species. Others said that the sideboards are unfairly distributed—they protect certain interests (such as wilderness and wildlife habitat), while leaving other interests (such as resource development and motorized use) vulnerable to further restrictions or loss of access. Some said that unless these sideboards are changed, they feel that they are being held hostage and are very reluctant to participate in a process that is already stacked against them.

Other people said that the sideboards need to be more specific or restrictive. They want sideboards to specify:

- That BLM will commit to implementing decisions that are arrived at through a BLM-sponsored collaborative process.
- That the RMP will support implementation of approved recovery plans for threatened and endangered species.
- The use of science-based criteria for approving Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs).
- That ACECs should be limited to areas with federally listed species, significant archaeological resources, and important

habitats which, if disturbed, would have significant detrimental effects on important life history events.

- The use of control areas at the watershed level to establish a baseline for evaluating the effects of grazing by cattle, elk, moose, etc.
- That the policies and objectives of the National Trails System Act will be included in the statutory framework of the draft EIS.

Most Important Objectives of Public Participation

When asked what objectives of public participation were most important, several people said that all of the following objectives were important. The objectives are listed here in order of the percentage of people who ranked that item as “most important.”

- 30 % Resolve conflict among competing interests.
- 19 % Increase the quality of the plan and final decisions.
- 16 % Foster trust, communication, and understanding among stakeholders, including the BLM.
- 10 % Seek public input and advice.
- 10 % Promote mutual understanding of the substantive issues.
- 9 % Provide information and education.
- 4 % Other.

Several people said that each objective overlaps with the others and all contribute to the quality of the plan. Many people spoke about public participation being an opportunity to build mutual understanding, trust, and better working relationships. Others said that public participation should provide a chance for too often neglected voices to be heard, including non-commercial, ecological, and motorized interests.

Some people emphasized that the process must provide feedback on public comments and allow people to see their comments in the broader spectrum of issues. This helps people understand other points of view and why the agency made the decision that it made.

Finally, a few people said that resolving conflict should be a low priority because it is not possible to make everyone happy. Government has a job to do, they said, and it is not BLM's responsibility to resolve conflict.

When Should the Public Be Involved?

When asked about the timing of public participation, many people said that the public should be involved at the beginning of the process and should have opportunities to stay involved during every step throughout the process. The usual steps are listed here in their logical order, along with the percentage of people who ranked that step as the "most important" time to be involved.

- 17 % Define and validate the existing social, economic, and biophysical condition of the planning area.
- 21 % Identify issues and concerns.
- 7 % Develop alternatives.
- 21 % Evaluate alternatives.
- 12 % Analyze and incorporate public comments (i.e., weigh and balance competing interests, including local and national viewpoints).
- 9 % Select a preferred plan.
- 12 % Monitor and evaluate implementation.
- 4 % Other.

Several people said that the definition of existing conditions and identification of issues and concerns should drive the alternatives. They said the public *must* be involved in defining problems and validating baseline resource data. If people can't agree on the definition of problems and on resource data, they won't buy into the problem, and there is no way to develop agreement on solutions. Some people said that the general public tends to have a broad vision of the problems, whereas most agencies and special interest groups have tunnel vision.

Some people said that the local public, in particular, should be involved from the outset in identifying resource problems. They often know more about what the problems are because these people have on-the-ground experience.

Several people said that public involvement in monitoring and plan implementation is important to hold BLM accountable. Sometimes agencies go through public participation, they said, ignore public input, and do what they want. Agencies undermine the public's trust unless people are involved at this stage. The public should hold BLM accountable to implementation of the RMP.

RAC members said they should be involved in the development and evaluation of alternatives and in the selection of the preferred plan.

A few people worried about straying too far from professional and scientific expertise. They said that the BLM should define the problem before seeking public input. They also suggested that the public does not have the expertise to evaluate alternatives.

Information Needed by the Public

When asked what information they needed to participate effectively in the RMP process, most people said that *all* of the following types of information were necessary. They are listed here in order by the percentage of people who ranked that item as "most important."

- 21 % Status of natural resources conditions.
- 17 % Economic trends.
- 17 % Agency constraints.
- 15 % Legal mandates.
- 13 % Public land user trends.
- 10 % Demographic trends.
- 6 % Other.

Many people said they want as accurate a baseline inventory on natural resource conditions as possible. They are concerned that the Dillon Field Office is lacking data on timber acreage, soil surveys, range by condition class, and hydrology. Several people emphasized the need to gather baseline data *before* the planning process begins. They also called for a peer (some said local) review group to review data on the condition of the resource and other baseline information. Several

people suggested an objective monitoring strategy to evaluate change from that baseline.

Some people mentioned the need for specific resource information, including:

- Objective data on sage grouse. Why did sage grouse suddenly disappear (at the same time that the density of sagebrush increased)?
- How much OHV use is occurring and how much damage is occurring because of that use? In private, BLM acknowledges the OHV problem, but not publicly.
- Information on timber inventory, growth, and yield and the kinds of material that BLM intends to put up for sales.
- Current information on the status of natural resources – quality, quantity, and locations.
- Wildlife population numbers, distribution, and habitat mapping.
- Information on economic trends and impact analyses, including impacts on individual operators, the community, and the tax base. (But a few people worried that economic considerations sometimes weigh in too heavily over biological and environmental concerns.)

People also want the BLM to verify its legal mandates and constraints, perhaps even get a second opinion to avoid misinterpretation. Several people want it clarified which agency constraints can be modified. Others said that the public must understand that their advice needs to be within these parameters, and that people need to understand the multiple-use mission of the BLM.

In other requests for specific information, people said that the BLM should:

- Be more visible. Clearly identify the lands that BLM is responsible for. Provide good maps and clearly identify where changes will take place.

- Clarify the land tenure situation.
- Describe historical travel and resource management practices, past uses, and maintenance standards. (These affect resource conditions and can determine in large part what kind of management and use is appropriate for each area.)
- Conduct field tours with stakeholders. “Show me the resource and where any problems are so I can see with my own eyes if there really is a problem.”
- Describe the condition of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail so we can compare it to our sense of the trail’s condition. Also, under what circumstances would constraints be placed on mountain bike use of the Continental Divide Trail?
- Clarify the criteria for deciding backcountry issues.
- Provide scientific information to justify any proposed reductions in cattle numbers.
- Explain BLM’s need to restrict access to rivers and its mandates to balance recreational and commercial uses of rivers that flow through BLM lands.
- Provide a good time line for the process, including identified opportunities for public input.

Beaverhead County officials said that their information needs are spelled out in the county’s resource use plan.

Finally, many people said that all information should be easy to read and understandable to the lay person. They want to see plain language that keeps the essence of the data. They also want the information to be provided early in the process.

Information that the Public can Provide

When asked what information they could bring to the process, most people offered their personal

experience and expertise. Specifically, these include:

- Costs and consequences to local government of having public land in the county (on roads, weed management, waste disposal, etc.).
- Knowledge of development occurring on lands surrounding public lands.
- National Wildlife Federation has resource staff, including one person who works exclusively on sage grouse and is on the sage grouse state working group. NWF can also offer legal expertise, and members include many people with on-the-ground knowledge of the area.
- Grazing permittees have personal experience on the allotments and on-the-ground knowledge of the state of the resource.
- Ranchers have field knowledge to integrate with the other range science information that goes into the plan.
- Local people offering knowledge of sage grouse to integrate with the technical information in the plan.
- Beaverhead County has a resource use plan, which was developed by a sub-committee of the County Planning Board.
- MFWP can provide technical assistance through field staff, and information to define the status of fish and wildlife in the planning area.
- Wildlife groups have considerable information regarding wildlife and the effects of grazing.
- The Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology has GIS databases on the distribution of mineral resources and mineral potential.
- The petroleum industry has current technical information regarding best practices,

mitigation measures, etc. for petroleum development.

- The timber industry can provide information on the status of the industry, timber economics, employment, industry's needs for raw materials (quality and quantity), market trends, etc.
- The Fishing Outfitter Association of Montana has information about economics, user trends, etc., regarding commercial use of the rivers. FOAM also has knowledge of the local fisheries.
- Friends of the Bitterroot has a good understanding of natural history, ecological sciences, local knowledge of lands that have been impaired, and local monitoring. Members have expertise in critical analysis and several specific issues (some members have seen problems from both sides of an issue).
- American Wildlands has current information about wildlife corridors for grizzly bear, elk, and mountain lion. Information for these three representative species is also applicable for several other species. American Wildlands also is completing aquatic diversity analysis modeling to identify the biologically richest stream reaches.
- Montana Audubon has information about critical seasons for migratory birds, information about raptors, and best management practices.
- Locals and people who are on the land a lot can provide landscape and resource knowledge and savvy.
- One person offered to provide an inventory of archaeology, paleontology, etc.
- The Montana Snowmobile Association can identify areas with snowmobile access problems and opportunities to improve the snowmobile trail grooming program.

- The Montana Trail Vehicle Rider Association admits they're not local but said they do know the resource, and they have lots of ideas on how to reduce impacts of motorized use.
- Continental Divide Trail Association has very detailed information on the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, and also ideas for revisions to the trail (south from Lemhi Pass the trail follows a road to avoid private property; we need funding to reroute trail and build new sections). We can identify opportunities to reroute the trail.
- Early in the process, we'd like to give our thoughts on existing conditions and the possibilities for improvement. We'd like to be able to informally talk with BLM staff.

The Public's Suggestions for Improving Public Participation

When asked how they would improve public participation in the RMP process, people suggested the following ideas and strategies.

- If we are going to spend time in the process, we want to see results. Show how public input is used, or why it wasn't used, in the decision making.
- Collaborative efforts tend to be big time sinks, which is especially frustrating when they don't work. Maybe have the RAC do the macro stuff and set up working groups to tackle specific resources and issues. The RAC can also facilitate public involvement as the process moves forward.
- Consensus sometimes closes the door on broader public participation—the working group sequesters itself in order to make real progress. It's important that the working group release periodic drafts of any emerging agreement to the public for review and comment.
- Involve local people to solve problems at the

local level. Listen to local knowledge. The process should be close to the grass roots.

- Keep national interests involved. Have a mechanism to bring their concerns to the table.
- We are concerned about an advisory group driving the planning process. How open will the process be? The process should not be dominated by special interests. It is much easier for paid staff to participate than it is for volunteers. The process must represent the overall public interest and must respect that the final decision rests with the agency.
- A collaborative group process should not slow down the decision. Keep the process moving fast. People lose interest when the process drags. Avoid repetitive arguments and participant turnover. Work with the same people throughout the process.
- An advisory committee process would work well. The process should be based on science, not emotions and politics, and decisions should be focused on what is good for the land.
- Any work group should be supported by a group of technical advisors with a clearly defined purpose.
- BLM must budget for public participation and help defray the costs for volunteer participants.
- The process must be informative rather than merely lining people up for battle. People need to feel like they are free to participate without being intimidated.
- We need to hear about the public land experiences of various interests and groups. Share experiences to develop understanding and empathy. Current information about public land user trends helps to understand expectations of other interest groups.

- Develop a set of mutually acceptable criteria and then approve what ever falls out of those criteria.
- Resource managers should coordinate and cooperate across property boundaries – BLM; U.S. Forest Service; Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; and private.
- The process must encourage two-way communication between the public and BLM.
- People are reluctant to get involved until there is a draft to shoot at.
- We need occasional access to the State Director's Office, not just people from the field office. We would like to see the new State Director once in awhile.
- Use lots of public service announcements on television and radio to publicize meetings well in advance, and to keep people updated on what's happening. Give people lots of lead time to fit meetings and other events into their schedules. At public hearings, have a "media room" so all perspectives can be presented to the reporters. Too often the reporters stay for only part of the hearing and miss important points of view. Or they base their coverage on how many people come in favor or against a proposal, like it's a vote. Draw up ground rules for the media.
- Don't rely just on legal notices, and not just in the paper of record. Shoot for feature articles and in-depth coverage.
- Regular attendance at meetings should not be a requirement for staying on top of the process.
- The process should include documentation of meetings and broad distribution of the meeting minutes.
- Don't schedule meetings in different towns on the same night. Don't hold meetings close

to holidays, or during the work day. Consider the time of year and how that influences who's able to participate.

- The study by the Montana Consensus Council is a good idea. This is not a typical step for agencies to take. The public process should incorporate some of the suggestions that came from the interviews.
- Update the mailing list.

How the Public Would Like to Participate

When directly asked how they would like to participate in the RMP process, most people said they would participate only if they felt it would truly make a difference. That is, they are reluctant to participate unless the process is designed to meaningfully incorporate their input and produce genuine, on-the-ground improvements in resource management on BLM lands. They also want some assurance from the outset that the BLM will use public input to shape the RMP.

Interestingly, many of these same people said they do not want BLM to relinquish its decision-making authority. They want BLM to ensure that the RMP is based on science and factual data rather than emotion or opinion, and they expect BLM to find an equitable balance among competing resource uses.

Many people talked about convening some form of citizen working group. Members of the RAC and many other people agreed that such a working group should function as a subgroup of the RAC. They were concerned, however, about how to include all the affected interests and how to find balanced representation among competing interests. They also voiced concerns about the time commitment and costs for the people who participate in the working group.

Some people said they preferred to submit comments through the public scoping steps under NEPA. A few said they would initiate their own direct dialogue with the BLM.

Many people said that the BLM should rely on as wide a range of participation strategies as possible. This would allow people to choose a forum that would best meet their needs and abilities, and would also enable the BLM to reach a broader spectrum of the interested public.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE MONTANA CONSENSUS COUNCIL

Based on what we heard during the interviews, and on our experience designing public participation processes, the Montana Consensus Council offers the following recommendations.

I. Principles of Public Participation

The following principles (adapted from the International Association of Public Participation) should be used to guide the public participation process for the RMP.

- A. The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
- B. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- C. The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
- D. The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
- E. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
- F. The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.
- G. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

II. Process Options

The Montana Consensus Council recommends that the BLM convene either (a) a working group with representatives of all the

affected interests to advise and assist the BLM on the development of the RMP; or (b) a series of feedback panels with citizens and/or public officials to address specific issues or steps in the process; or (c) some combination of (a) and (b), for example a working group that addresses only selected issues.

II(a). Working Group Option

Suggested features of the working group:

- The working group should supplement, not replace, public participation processes required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- The working group should be formed as a subgroup of the Resource Advisory Council (RAC) in compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The working group should submit its findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the RAC, which in turn will forward appropriate recommendations to the BLM.
- The working group should include representatives of each affected interest or caucus, including the BLM, the RAC, county commissioners, main-street business and industry, grazing, timber, minerals, motorized recreation, fish and wildlife, and preservation.
- The representatives for each caucus should be selected by that caucus and confirmed by the full working group, RAC, and BLM.
- The representatives for each caucus will be responsible for attending regular meetings of the working group and communicating on a regular basis with the members of their caucus.
- The working group should determine the scope of its work consistent with NEPA and the time constraints of the RMP process.

- The working group should periodically consult with the RAC, county commissioners, state legislators, and the Governor's Office.
- The working group should periodically meet with the public to explain its work – findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
- The working group should select and hire an impartial facilitator to help complete the design of the overall process, coordinate the process, facilitate meetings, mediate disputes, document progress, and produce a short 30-page executive summary of the Draft EIS and RMP in plain language. The BLM would provide funding for hiring the facilitator.
- The working group should keep the process on schedule, handing off unresolved issues to the RAC and BLM if an impasse is reached.

II(b). Feedback Panel(s) Option

Suggested features of citizen and/or public official feedback panels.

- The BLM should conduct a series of feedback panels with citizens and public officials to address specific issues or steps in the process.
- A feedback panel is similar to a focus group but with more opportunity to exchange information and engage in a high-quality dialogue. The feedback panel would meet once a month for a half day or full day at a time, perhaps meeting over several months to fully address a specific issue.
- Feedback panels could be composed of only citizens, only other public officials, or a combination depending on the issue.
- Feedback panels could address and complete many, if not all, of the same tasks as the working group. Feedback panels could be convened to discuss:
 - (a) planning criteria or sideboards;
 - (b) baseline resource data or the management situation;

- (c) sage grouse;
- (d) areas of critical environmental concern;
- (e) wilderness study areas;
- (f) public access and travel management planning;
- (g) implementation and monitoring; and
- (h) other key issues.

III. Other Public Participation and Intergovernmental Coordination Strategies

In addition to the working group or feedback panels—or as a fallback option if no working group or panels are convened—the BLM should rely on a variety of strategies to:

- **Inform the public;**
- **Seek public input and advice;**
- **Consult other governmental agencies;**
- **Facilitate intergovernmental coordination;**
- **Promote mutual understanding;**
- **Foster trust and communication;**
- **Resolve, when possible, conflict among competing interests; and**
- **Increase the quality of the plan and final decisions.**

The strategies to facilitate public participation and intergovernmental coordination should include the following elements and expectations as identified during the interviews:

- **Rely on the RAC, county commissioners, and existing interagency working groups** in both Beaverhead and Madison counties to foster understanding and consistency across management jurisdictions.
- **Clarify the planning criteria or sideboards.**
- **Review and validate the baseline resource data** or description of the management situation.

- Invite people to **submit any information** they can contribute.
- Invite **local people to share their knowledge** and experience with participants.
- **Respond to the requests for information** identified during the interviews.
- Provide **maps, GIS data, photographs, graphs of resource and use trends, and other visual information** to build understanding of the resources, landscape, and issues.
- Conduct **field trips** to build a deeper understanding of the resources, landscape, and specific problems.
- **Create electronic opportunities** to participate, including adding planning documents and searchable text on the RMP to the BLM web site; creating an email listserv to distribute information and updates to interested people; providing an email address to which people can post comments; and setting up a toll-free telephone line to provide recorded updates and information on the planning process.
- **Invite a reporter** experienced in covering public participation and natural resource issues to attend monthly meetings of the working group and **prepare feature articles for the newspaper** about the process, emerging issues and proposed solutions, and opportunities for public participation.
- Provide regular **public service announcements** to radio and television stations in the region to announce upcoming meetings and events.
- **Schedule meetings and other events** for times (probably evenings) and days that are convenient for most people. Provide ample notice well in advance of meetings, and allow plenty of time during meetings to exchange information and take public comment.

- **Use plain, everyday language** in all written and verbal communication. Be concise, and avoid jargon and generalities.

NEXT STEPS

The Montana Consensus Council will convene a **work session on Thursday, July 12, 2001, at 6:30 p.m., at the Lewis and Clark Room, University of Montana - Western in Dillon.**

The work session is open to any individual or group interested in the RMP.

The purpose of the work session is to:

1. Validate the findings and conclusions of the needs assessment and this report.
2. Review and seek agreement on the principles to guide the public participation process.
3. Examine the pros and cons of convening a working group or a series of feedback panels – and seek agreement on which approach to implement.
4. Further develop the agreed-upon approach. If participants agree that a working group is most desirable, then further develop that process. Specifically, have each caucus talk about the possibility of selecting a representative (or two) and how they will sustain communication throughout the process and make decisions on working group proposals.
5. Further develop the public participation and intergovernmental coordination strategies.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

We asked the following 10 questions during each interview:

1. Before we discuss the type of public participation process that you would like to see, would you like to clarify your interests in managing the natural resources under BLM jurisdiction?
 - ___ Provide information and education.
 - ___ Seek public input and advice.
 - ___ Promote mutual understanding of the substantive issues.
 - ___ Increase the quality of the plan and final decisions.
 - ___ Foster trust, communication, and understanding among stakeholders, including the BLM.
 - ___ Resolve conflict among competing interests.
 - ___ Other. Please explain.
2. Do you have any comments or questions on the planning criteria or sideboards, which are enclosed?
3. What are the most important objectives of public participation in developing the BLM Resource Management Plan? Please rank the following possible objectives according to their importance to you (1 = most important, 2 = less important, or 3 = least important).
 - ___ Analyze and incorporate public comments (i.e., weigh and balance competing interests, including local and national viewpoints).
 - ___ Select a preferred plan.
 - ___ Monitor and evaluate implementation.
 - ___ Other. Please explain.
4. When is the most important time for the public to be involved in the planning process? Please rank the following steps according to their importance to you (1 = most important, 2 = less important, or 3 = least important).
 - ___ Status of natural resources conditions.
 - ___ Economic trends.
 - ___ Demographic trends.
 - ___ Public land user trends.
 - ___ Legal mandates.
 - ___ Agency constraints.
 - ___ Other. Please explain.
5. What type of information would be most helpful to you to effectively participate in the planning process? Why, and where would you suggest gathering such information?
 - ___ Status of natural resources conditions.
 - ___ Economic trends.
 - ___ Demographic trends.
 - ___ Public land user trends.
 - ___ Legal mandates.
 - ___ Agency constraints.
 - ___ Other. Please explain.
6. What type of information do you have to contribute to the planning process? How and when would you like to present that information?
7. What is the most useful way for the Bureau of Land Management to:
 - A. Communicate information on existing conditions and trends?
 - B. Present alternatives?
 - C. Summarize public comments?
 - D. Explain how public comments are incorporated into the decision-making process?
 - E. Publish the final plan and environmental impact statement?
8. What other suggestions do you have to improve public participation in the Resource Management Planning process?
9. How would you like to participate in the planning process?
10. Would you be willing to participate in a workshop to talk about a proposed public participation process based on the results of this research? If yes, what specifically would you like to see come out of the workshop?

